

History of Greyton

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Sources:

1. Helen Robinson, Thesis,
Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cape Town, 1986
2. Personal Communication with Mrs. C.Nel, Great-Granddaughter of Mr. Herbert Vigne
3. James Walton,
Double-storied, flat-roofed buildings of the rural Cape. Cape Town 1993

Timetable

- 1795 First documents can be found in archives of a transaction between the East India Company and a Hendrik Cloete, a Heemraad of Stellenbosch. It is of interest, that the negotiations were made in the name of a deceased person. This Mr. Cloete must have died between his application and the granting of property rights on the Farm Weltevreden. In a case like this, a fundamental feature of our western society or better of the Roman Dutch Law becomes apparent. Property survives people! There is not a piece of ground, which has no owner! The owner might not be known, but there is one!

Lets go back to the Quickrentplace hired out by the East India Company. It was a Sergeant, an employee of that company and station commander in Zoetmelkvlei on the road to Swellendam, Theunissen who hired this Farm for cattle and sheep farming. Somehow, there was trouble most probably about labour between the missionaries in Genadendal and the farmers in this area.

During the next years, the quickrentplace Weltevreden, originally part of Boschmannskloof, an old settlement of Khoi Bushmen, was transferred into a freehold.

- 1846 Herbert Vigne purchased this Farm Weltevreden.

It must not be overlooked that it was just 50 years after the first English occupation of the Cape. The Napoleonic wars had given finally England the possession of the Dutch governed Cape! Colonies were the place where one could afford to obtain land and possibly make a fortune.

There were three Vigne brothers.

Henry Vigne was married in England to Lady Barnard Cousin. He bought the Farm Tygerhoek. After his death his two daughters inherited the farm. The one sold her share to the Dutch Reformed Church, which in turn created the town of Riviersonderend on that piece of ground. On the other half at a later stage the Government Research Farm Tygerhoek was established.

George Vigne stayed in England and married the sister of Sir George Grey, later the Governor of the Cape. Grey was born 1812 in Lisbon as son of Colonel Grey and became 1841 Governor of South Australia. From 1845 he held the same position in New Zealand before he arrived 1854 in South Africa. He had the reputation of being the best governor of all times, because the English, Boers and Natives liked him. However, he was recalled in 1859 for having encouraged a scheme for the unification of the whole of South Africa without authority! Later he became Prime Minister of New Zealand, died in 1898 and is buried in St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

The third Vigne brother Herbert must be called in modern terms a township developer! He laid out a small town on his farm Weltevreden and called it after the brother-in-law of his brother Henry, Greyton. The sale was advertised in the newsheets of the day and must have attracted buyers from beyond the immediate district and nearby Genadendal.

- 1854 At least 120 plots were sold outright to purchasers from all over the Cape at prices ranging from five to 11 pounds ten shillings each. The sale of erven provided Herbert Vigne with a continuing income other than from farming. In return , he provided water for the village and commonage, for which he ceded almost all the land he owned beyond the village limits.
Herbert Vigne's own residence was situated at the end of the village towards Genadendal on a substantial piece of land, called "De Bos". This house was partially destroyed by fire early in this century but remains as the central part of the more modern home of Mr. Weder, Mayor for long years in Greyton.
The erven were arranged around "De Bos" with smaller plots abutting directly onto the home farm. The larger agricultural plots were designed according to the leiwat channels which form a kind of a crescent ending in the Noupoot Kloof. Nearly 150 years later, this irrigation scheme is still the backbone of life in Greyton. Without it the horticultural village of Greyton could not survive the severely dry summer month from January to March.
Shortly, after Greyton was marketed, a similar village was set up on the other side of the mountains and named after the Governors wife, Lady Grey! Later it was renamed McGregor. It never obtained the same charme as Greyton.
- 1863 The relation between the two villages demanded a traffic link! Therefore, Herbert Vigne tendered to build a footpath from Greyton to Lady Grey.
- 1866 A Management Board for Greyton was appointed.
- 1876 English Church Mission School was established and functioned in the "Overberg Trading Post" opposite today's Municipal Offices in Ds.Botha Street.
- 1879 First Post office in the Post House Inn.
- 1888 School for white children only. Today's Municipal Offices.
- 1895 Deaths of Herbert and Elizabeth Vigne.
- 1899 Moravian School at village entrance built. Today Library.
- 1900 New Post Office. Houses today Greyton Properties
- 1904 Anglican Church built.
- 1905 Dutch Reformed Church built. Later taken over by Moravian Church.
- 1910 Greyton proclaimed a Municipality.
First Tennis Court built.
- 1914 Unsuccessful bid for railway link with Caledon.
- 1923 Greyton Football Club founded.
- 1927 Building on the Greyton - McGregor Pass began.
Typhoid in the village.
- 1928 Post Office moved to present site.
- 1929 First Government School in Greyton.
- 1933 First piped water scheme completed.
- 1934 Bridge over the Riviersonderend River, replacing the ferry boat.
- 1939 New building for Government School
- 1941 Boschmannskloof Pass abandoned, lack of funds.
- 1947 First School Hostel
- 1951 First tarred road in Greyton
- 1952 First Clinic at Market Square
- 1961 New School Hostel
- 1962 Railway Bus collects products once a week.
- 1977 Proclamation of Nature Reserve
- 1980 Heuvelkroon School built (Greyton Primêr)
- 1984 Town Planning Scheme for Greyton

1985 Revaluation of plots for rating purposes.
1987 Great fire in Greyton. 7 houses with thatched roof lost.

Remarks on buildings

Posthouse and Bloom's Pottery

There are only two houses in Greyton which bear the plaque the National Monuments Council: Bloom's Pottery and the Post-house Inn. Of both the building dates are unknown and alterations have been carried out on the original buildings. It is unlikely, that they were build with corrugated iron roofs.

Ploom's Pottery is of special interest, in so far, as it has a double storey and is flat roofed. The flat roof has been introduced in the Cape because of fire hazards in Cape Town. Fires were spreading rapidly via thatched roofs in densely built-up areas. As a verification to this feature it should be mentioned that in the fire in Greyton of 1987 7 houses burnt down and all had a thatched roof. Before the advent of corrugated iron sheets the construction of flat roofs with bricks or slates were difficult to make waterproof.

May be that for this reason the upper storey is reported to be used mainly as storage area, accessible only by an outside staircase. Here differs Ploom's Pottery, where the staircase leads up in the interior of the house.

As far as it is known, no published records are available on the Posthouse Inn.

Gables

Gables played an important role in South African buildings. In Greyton only a few exist and of not much importance. An interesting feature , however, is that the old thatched roofs in Greyton end at the wall. In other areas the thatch covers the gable wall. The reason may be found in the composition of mudbricks used for the construction of walls. Mudbricks with very low silicate contents will dissolve in rainy weathers and erode fast. Therefore, the wall-tops must be protected against rain.

Windows

Old simple,rural houses had small windows and thick walls, for better insulation. To keep the warmth in winter inside and the heat outside in summertime. For better dwellings sash windows were used. These allowed to put up shutters on the outside, also for better insulation against heat and wind. The modern, outwards opening windows prohibit outside shutters. As a substitute inside shutters can be found, but they are less effective as "airconditioners" because they do not allow air circulation and sun-rays are blocked inside the room and some of the insulation effect is lost.

As an exception, in Genadendal inwards opening windows with shutters can be found. They were introduced by the German missionaries.